This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

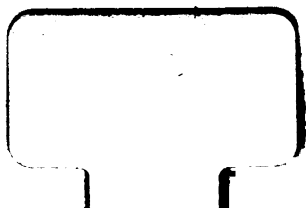
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

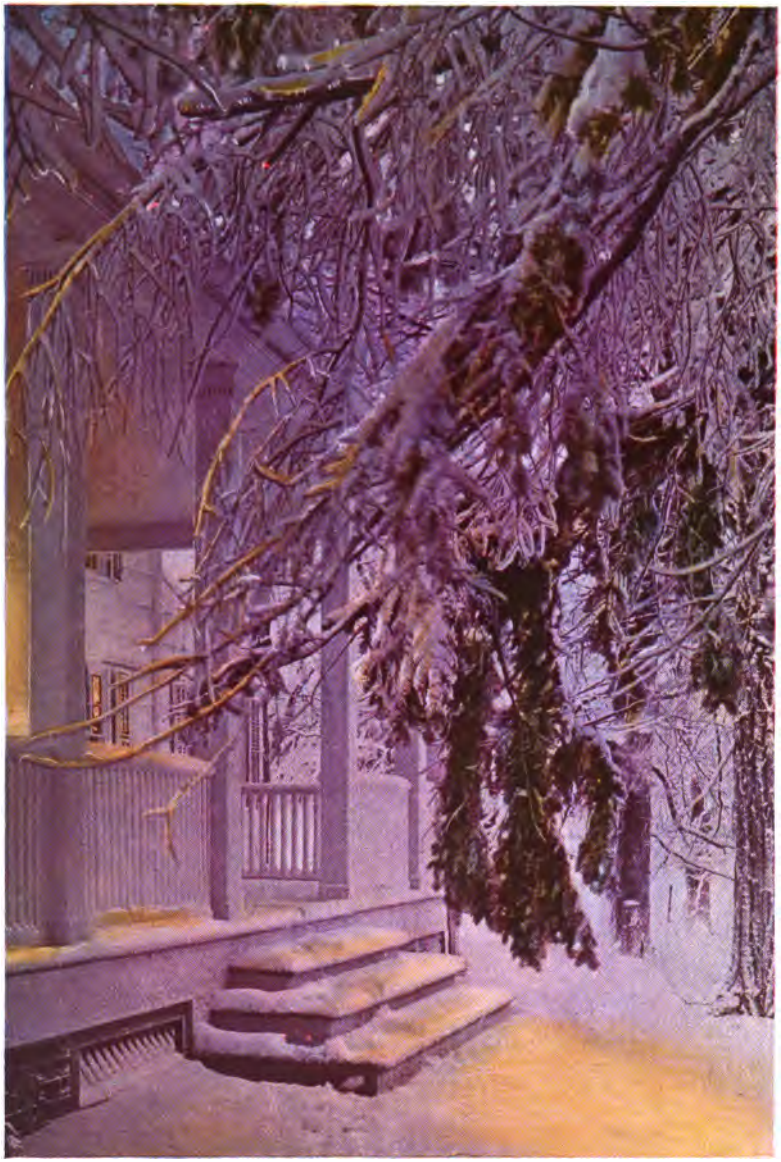
NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3 3433 07495129 8

When the Yule Log Burns

Leona Dalrymple

1. No subject.





"The Doctor's old-fashioned house loomed gray-white through the snow-fringed branches of the trees."

When the Yule Log Burns

A Christmas Story

By Leona Dalrymple

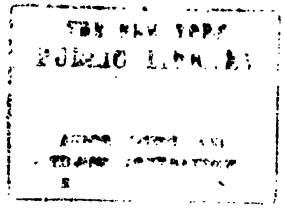
Author of "Uncle Noah's Christmas Party," etc.

New York

Robert M. McBride & Company

1916

Copyright, 1916, by
Robert M. McBride & Co.



Published November, 1916

CONTENTS

PART I

IN WHICH WE LIGHT A YULE-LOG

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	KINDLINGS	3
II	WISHING SPARKS	11
III	BY THE FIRE	16
IV	EMBERS	22

PART II

IN WHICH WE LIGHT THE NEW LOG WITH THE EMBERS OF THE OLD

I	THE FIRE AGAIN	33
II	IT BLAZES HIGHER	41
III	THE LOG AT DAWN	46
IV	THE LOG AT TWILIGHT	54

Part One

In Which We Light a Yule Log

When the Yule Log Burns

I

Kindlings

POLLY, the Doctor's old white mare, plodded slowly along the snowy country road by the picket fence, and turned in at the snow-capped posts. Ahead, roofed with the ragged ermine of a newly-fallen snow, the Doctor's old-fashioned house loomed gray-white through the snow-fringed branches of the trees, a quaint iron lantern, which was picturesque by day and luminous and cheerful by night, hanging within the square, white-pillared portico at the side. That the many-paned, old-fashioned window on the right framed the snow-white head of Aunt Ellen Leslie, the Doctor's wife, the old Doctor himself was comfortably aware — for his kindly eyes missed nothing.

He could have told you with a reflective stroke of his grizzled beard that the snow had stopped but an hour since, and that now through the white and heavy lacery of branches to the west glowed the

NYPL

flame-gold of a winter sunset, glinting ruddily over the box-bordered brick walk, the orchard and the comfortable barn which snugly housed his huddled cattle; that the grasslands to the south were thickly blanketed in white; that beyond in the evergreen forest the stately pines and cedars were marvelously draped and coiffed in snow. For the old Doctor loved these things of Nature as he loved the peace and quiet of his home.

So, as he turned in at the driveway and briskly resigned the care of Polly to old Asher, his seamed and wrinkled helper, the Doctor's eyes were roving now to a corner, snug beneath a tattered rug of snow, where by summer Aunt Ellen's petunias and phlox and larkspur grew — and now to the rose-bushes ridged in down, and at last to his favorite winter nook, a thicket of black alders freighted with a wealth of berries. How crimson they were amid the white quiet of the garden! And the brightly colored fruit of the barberry flamed forth from a snowy bush like the cheerful elf-lamps of a wood-gnome.

There was equal cheer and color in the old-fashioned sitting-room to which the Doctor presently made his way, for a wood fire roared with a winter gleam and crackle in the fireplace and Aunt Ellen Leslie rocked slowly back and forth by the window with a letter in her hand.

"Another letter!" exclaimed the Doctor, warming his hands before the blazing log. "God bless my soul, Ellen, we're becoming a nuisance to Uncle Sam!" But for all the brisk cheeriness of his voice he was furtively aware that Aunt Ellen's brown eyes were a little tearful, and presently crossing the room to her side, he gently drew the crumpled letter from her hand and read it.

"So John's not coming home for Christmas either, eh?" he said at last. "Well, now, that *is* too bad! Now, now, *now*, mother," as Aunt Ellen surreptitiously wiped her glasses, "we should feel proud to have such busy children. There's Ellen and Margaret and Anne with a horde of youngsters to make a Christmas for, and John — bless your heart, Ellen, *there's* a busy man! A broker now is one of the very busiest of men! And what with John's kiddies and his beautiful society wife and that grand Christmas eve ball he mentions — why —" the Doctor cleared his throat,—"why, dear me, it's not to be wondered at, say I! And Philip and Howard — busy as — as — as architects and lawyers usually are at Christmas," he finished lamely. "As for Ralph —" the Doctor looked away —"well, Ralph hasn't spent a Christmas home since college days."

"It will be the first Christmas we ever spent without some of them home," ventured Aunt Ellen, biting

her lip courageously, whereupon the old Doctor patted her shoulder gently with a cheery word of advice.

Now, there was something in the touch of the old Doctor's broad and gentle hand that always soothed, wherefore Aunt Ellen presently wiped her troublesome glasses again and bravely tried to smile, and the Doctor making a vast and altogether cheerful to-do about turning the blazing log, began a brisk description of his day. It had ended, professionally, at a lonely little house in the heart of the forest, which Jarvis Hildreth, dying but a scant year since, had bequeathed to his orphaned children, Madge and Roger.

"And, Ellen," finished the Doctor, soberly, "there he sits by the window, day by day, poor lame little lad! — staring away so wistfully at the forest, and Madge, bless her brave young heart! — she bastes and stitches and sews away, all the while weaving him wonderful yarns about the pines and cedars to amuse him — all out of her pretty head, mind you! A lame brother and a passion for books —" said the Doctor, shaking his head, "a poor inheritance for the lass. They worry me a lot, Ellen, for Madge looks thin and tired, and to-day —" the Doctor cleared his throat, "I think she had been crying."

"Crying!" exclaimed Aunt Ellen, her kindly

brown eyes warm with sympathy. "Dear, dear!—And Christmas only three days off! Why, John, dear, we must have them over here for Christmas. To be sure! And we'll have a tree for little Roger and a Christmas masquerade and such a wonderful Christmas altogether as he's never known before!" And Aunt Ellen, with the all-embracing motherhood of her gentle heart aroused, fell to planning a Christmas for Madge and Roger Hildreth that would have gladdened the heart of the Christmas saint himself.

Face aglow, the old Doctor bent and patted his wife's wrinkled hand.

"Why, Ellen," he confessed, warmly, "it's the thing I most desired! Dear me, it's a very strange thing indeed, my dear, how often we seem to agree. I'll hitch old Billy to the sleigh and go straight after them now while Annie's getting supper!" And at that instant one glance at Aunt Ellen Leslie's fine old face, framed in the winter firelight which grew brighter as the checkerboard window beside her slowly purpled, would have revealed to the veriest tyro why the Doctor's patients liked best to call her "Aunt" Ellen.

So, with a violent jingle of sleigh-bells, the Doctor presently shot forth again into the white and quiet world, and as he went, gliding swiftly past the ghostly spruces by the roadside, oddly enough, despite his cheerful justification to Aunt Ellen, he was

fiercely rebelling at the defection of his children. John and his lovely wife might well have foregone their fashionable ball. And Howard and Philip — their holiday-keeping Metropolitan clubs were shallow artificialities surely compared with a home-keeping reunion about the Yule log. As for the children of Anne and Ellen and Margaret — well, the Doctor could just tell those daughters of his that their precious youngsters liked a country Christmas best — he *knew* they did! — not the complex, steam-heated hot-house off-shoot of that rugged flower of simpler times when homes were further apart, but a country Christmas of keen, crisp cold and merry sleighbells, of rosy cheeks and snow-balls, of skating on the Deacon's pond and a jubilant hour after around the blazing wood-fire: a Christmas, in short, such as the old Doctor himself knew and loved, of simplicity and sympathy and home-keeping heartiness!

And then — there was Ralph — but here the Doctor's face grew very stern. Wild tales came to him at times of this youngest and most gifted of his children — tales of intemperate living interlarded with occasional tales of brilliant surgical achievement on the staff of St. Michael's. For the old Doctor had guided the steps of his youngest son to the paths of medicine with a great hope, long abandoned.

Ah — well! The Doctor sighed, abruptly turn-

ing his thoughts to Madge and Roger. They at least should know the heart-glow of a real Christmas! A masquerade party of his neighbors Christmas eve, perhaps, such as Aunt Ellen had suggested, and a Yule-log — but now it was, in the midst of his Christmas plans, that a daring notion flashed temptingly through the Doctor's head, was banished with a shrug and flashed again, whereupon with his splendid capacity for prompt decision, the Doctor suddenly wheeled old Billy about and went sleighing in considerable excitement into the village whence a host of night-telegrams went singing over the busy wires to startle eventually a slumbering conscience or so. And presently when the Doctor drew up with a flourish before the lonely little house among the forest pines, his earlier depression had vanished.

So with a prodigious stamping of snow from his feet and a cheerful wave of his mittened hand to the boy by the window, the Doctor bustled cheerily indoors and with kindly eyes averted from the single tell-tale sauce-pan upon the fire, over which Madge Hildreth had bent with sudden color, fell to bustling about with a queer lump in his throat and talking ambiguously of Aunt Ellen's Christmas orders, painfully conscious that the girl's dark face had grown pitifully white and tense and that Roger's wan little face was glowing. And when the fire was damped by the Doctor himself, and his Christmas guests

hustled into dazed, protesting readiness, the Doctor deftly muffled the thin little fellow in blankets and gently carried him out to the waiting sleigh with arms that were splendid and sturdy and wonderfully reassuring.

"There, there, little man!" he said cheerfully, "we've not hurt the poor lame leg once, I reckon. And now we'll just help Sister Madge blow out the lamp and lock the door and be off to Aunt Ellen!"

But, strangely enough, the Doctor halted abruptly in the doorway and turned his kindly eyes away to the shadowy pines. And Sister Madge, on her knees by Roger's bed, sobbing and praying in an agony of relief, presently blew out the lamp herself and wiped her eyes. For nights among the whispering pines are sleepless and long when work is scarce and Christmas hovers with cold, forbidding eyes over the restless couch of a dear and crippled brother.

II

Wishing Sparks

ROUND the Doctor's house frolicked the brisk, cold wind of a Christmas eve, boisterously rattling the luminous checkerboard windows and the Christmas wreaths, tormenting the cheerful flame in the old iron lantern and whisking away the snow from the shivering elms, whistling eerily down the Doctor's chimney to startle a strange little cripple by the Doctor's fire, who, queerly enough, would not be startled.

For to Roger there had never been a wind so Christmasy, or a fire so bright and warm, and his solemn black eyes glowed! Never a wealth of holly and barberry and alder-berries so crimson as that which rimmed the snug old house in Christmas flame! Never such evergreen wreaths, for, tucked up here in this very chair by Aunt Ellen, he had made them all himself of boughs from the evergreen forest! And never surely such enticing odors as had floated out for the last two days from old Annie's pots and pans as she baked and roasted and boiled and stewed in endless preparation for Christmas day and the Christmas eve party, scolding away betimes in in-

dignant whispers at old Asher, who, by reason of a chuckling air of mystery, was in perpetual disgrace.

Wonderful days indeed for Roger, with Sister Madge's smooth, pale cheeks catching the flaring scarlet of the holly, and Sister Madge's slim and willing fingers so busy hanging boughs that she had forgotten to sigh; with motherly Aunt Ellen so warmly intent upon Roger's comfort and plans for the masquerade that many a mysterious and significant occurrence slipped safely by her kindly eyes; and with the excited Doctor's busy sleigh jingling so hysterically about on secret errands and his kindly face so full of boyish mystery that Roger, with the key to all this Christmas intrigue locked safely in his heart, had whispered a shy little warning in the culprit's attentive ear.

And presently — Roger caught his breath and furtively eyed the grandfather's clock, ticking boastfully through a welter of holly — presently it would be time for the Doctor's masquerade, and later, when the clock struck twelve and the guests unmasked, that great surprise which the doctor had planned so carefully by telegram!

But now from the kitchen came the sound of the Doctor singing:

"Come bring with a noise,
My merry, merry boys,
The Christmas log to the firing!"

Roger clapped his thin little hands with a cry of delight, for old Asher and the Doctor were bringing in the Yule-log to light it presently with the charred remains of the Christmas log of a year ago. Tomorrow another Yule-log would crackle and blaze and shower on the hearth, for the old Doctor molded a custom to suit his fancy. And here was Annie splendidly aproned in white, following them in, and Aunt Ellen in a wonderful old brown-gold brocade disinterred for the doctor's party from a lavender-sweet cedar chest in the garret. And *Sister Madge!* — Roger stared — radiant in old-fashioned crimson satin and holly, colorful foils indeed for her night-black hair and eyes! As for the doctor himself, Roger now began to realize that with his powdered wig, his satin breeches and gaily-flowered waistcoat — to say nothing of silken hose and silver buckles — he was by far the most gorgeous figure of them all!

"I," said the doctor presently, striking the burning Yule-log until the golden sparks flew out, "I charge thee, log, to burn out old wrongs and heart-burnings!" and then, in accordance with a cherished custom of his father's he followed the words with a wish for the good of his household.

"And I," said old Asher as he struck the log, "I wish for the good of the horses and cows and all the other live things and," with a terrific chuckle

of mystery, "I wish for things aplenty *this* night."

"And I," said old Annie, with a terrible look at her imprudent spouse as she took the poker, "I wish for the harvest — and wit for them that lack it!"

But Roger had the poker now, his black eyes starry.

"I — I wish for more kind hearts like Aunt Ellen's and the Doctor's," he burst forth with a strangled sob as the sparks showered gold, "for more — more sisters like Sister Madge —" his voice quivered and broke—"and for — for all boys who cannot walk and run —" but Sister Madge's arm was already around his shoulders and the old Doctor was patting his arm — wherefore he smiled bravely up at them through glistening tears.

"Now, now, now, little lad!" reminded the Doctor, "it's Christmas eve!" Whereupon he drew a chair to the fire and began a wonderful Christmas tale about St. Boniface and Thunder Oak and the first Christmas tree. A wonderful old Doctor this — reflected Roger wonderingly. He knew so many different things — how to scare away tears and all about mistletoe and Druids, and still another story about a fir tree which Roger opined respectfully was nothing like so good as Sister Madge's story of the Cedar King who stood outside his window.

"Very likely not!" admitted the Doctor gravely.

"I've nothing like the respect for Mr. Hans Andersen myself that I have for Sister Madge."

"I thought," ventured Roger shyly, slipping his hand suddenly into the Doctor's, "that Doctors only knew how to cure folks!"

"Bless your heart, laddie," exclaimed the Doctor, considerably staggered; "they know too little of that, I fear. My conscience!" as the grandfather's clock came into the conversation with a throaty boom, "it's half-past seven!" and from then on Roger noticed the Doctor was uneasy, presently opining, with a prodigious "Hum!" that Aunt Ellen looked mighty pale and tired and that he for one calculated a little sleigh ride would brace her up for the party. This Aunt Ellen immediately flouted and the Doctor was eventually forced to pathetic and frequent reference to his own great need of air.

"Very well, my dear," said Aunt Ellen mildly, striving politely to conceal her opinion of his mental health, "I'll go, since you feel so strongly about it, but a sleigh ride in such a wind and such clothes when one is expecting party guests—" but the relieved Doctor was already bundling the brown-gold brocade into a fur-lined coat and furtively winking at Roger! Thus it was that even as the Doctor's sleigh flew merrily by the Deacon's pond, far across the snowy fields to the north gleamed the lights of the 7.52 rushing noisily into the village.

III

By the Fire

HOW it was that the old Doctor somehow lost his way on roads he had traveled since boyhood was a matter of exceeding mystery and annoyance to Aunt Ellen, but lose it he did. By the time he found it and jogged frantically back home, the old house was already aswarm with masked, mysterious guests and old Asher with a lantern was peering excitedly up the road. Holly-trimmed sleighs full of merry neighbors in disguise were dashing gaily up — and in the midst of all the excitement the Doctor miraculously discovered his own mask and Aunt Ellen's in the pocket of his great-coat. So hospitable Aunt Ellen, considerably perturbed that so many of her guests had arrived in her absence — an absence carefully planned by the Doctor — betook herself to the masquerade, and the Christmas party began with bandits and minstrels and jesters and all sorts of queer folk flitting gaily about the house. They paid gallant court to Roger in his great chair by the fire and presently began to present for his approval an impromptu Mummer's play.

And now the lights were all out and a masked and courtly old gentleman in satin breeches was standing in the bright firelight pouring brandy into a giant bowl of raisins; and now he was gallantly bowing to Roger himself who was plainly expected to assist with a lighted match. He did this with trembling fingers and eyes so big and black and eloquent that the Doctor cleared his throat; and as the leaping flames from the snapdragon bowl flashed weirdly over the bizarre company in the shadows Roger, eagerly watching them snatch the raisins from the fire, fell to trembling in an ecstasy of delight. Presently a slender arm in a crimson sleeve, whose wearer was never very far from Roger's chair, slipped quietly about his shoulders and held him very tight. So, an endless round of merry Christmas games until, deep and mellow came at last the majestic boom of the grandfather's clock striking twelve and with it a hearty babel of Christmas greetings as the Doctor, smiling significantly down into Roger's excited eyes, gave the signal to unmask.

By the fire a mysterious little knot of guests had been silently gathering, and now as Aunt Ellen Leslie removed her mask, hand and mask halted in mid-air as if fixed by the stare of Medusa, and the face above the brown-gold brocade flamed crimson. For here in Puritan garb was John Leslie, Jr., and his radiant wife — and Philip and Howard, smiling Quakers,

and Anne and Margaret and Ellen with a trio of husbands, and beyond a laughing jester in cap and bells, whose dark, handsome face was a little too reckless and tired about the eyes, Roger thought, for a really happy Christmas guest — young Doctor Ralph.

As Aunt Ellen's startled eyes swept slowly from the smiling faces of her children to the proud and chuckling Doctor who had spent Heaven knows how many dollars in telegraphed commands — she laughed a little and cried a little and then mingled the two so queerly that she needs must wipe her eyes and catch at Roger's chair for support, whereupon a kindly little hand slipped suddenly into hers and Roger looked up and smiled serenely.

"Don't cry, Aunt Ellen!" he begged shyly. "I knew all about it too and the Doctor — *he* did it all!"

"And merry fits he gave us all by telegram, too, mother!" exclaimed Philip with a grin.

"Moreover," broke in John, patting his mother's shoulder, "there are eleven kids packed away upstairs like sardines — we hid 'em away while dad and you were lost, and —" but here with a deafening racket the stairs door burst wide open and with a swoop and a scream eleven pajama-ed young bandits with starry eyes bore down upon Aunt Ellen and the Doctor.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed John, thoroughly scandalized, "you disgraceful kids! Which one of you stirred this up?" But the guilty face at the tail of the romping procession was the face of old Asher.

Radiantly triumphant the old Doctor swung little John Leslie 3rd to his shoulder and faced his laughing family and as old Annie appeared with a steaming tray — he seized a mug of cider and held it high aloft.

"To the ruddy warmth of the Christmas log and the Christmas home spirit —" he cried —"to the home-keeping hearts of the country-side! Gentlemen — I give you — A Country home and a Country Christmas! May more good folk come to know them!" And little John Leslie cried hoarsely —

"Hooray, grandpop, hooray for a Country Christmas!"

Carelessly alive to the merry spirit of the night, the jester presently adjusted a flute which hung from his shoulder by a scarlet cord and lazily piping a Christmas air, wandered to another room — to come suddenly upon a forgotten playmate of his boyhood days.

"It — it can't be!" he reflected in startled interest. "It surely can't be Madge Hildreth!"

But Madge Hildreth it surely was, spreading the satin folds of his grandmother's crimson gown in

mocking courtesy. Moreover it was not the awkward, ragged elfish little gipsy who had tormented his debonair boyhood with her shy ardent worship of himself and his daring exploits, but instead a winsome vision of Christmas color and Christmas cheer, holly-red of cheek, with flashes of scarlet holly in her night black hair and eyes whose unfathomable dusk reflected no single hint of that old, wild worship slumbering still in the girl's rebellious heart.

"And the symbolism of this stunning make-up?" queried Ralph after a while, lazily admiring.

The girl's eyes flashed.

"To-night, if you please," she said, "I am the spirit of the old-fashioned Christmas who dwells in the holly heart of the evergreen wood. A *country* Christmas, ruddy-cheeked and cheerful and rugged like the winter holly — simple and old-fashioned and hallowed with memories like this bright soft crimson gown!"

Well, she had been a queer, fanciful youngster too, Doctor Ralph remembered, always passionately aquiver with a wild sylvan poetry and over-fond of book-lore like her father. Mischievously glancing at a spray of mistletoe above the girl's dark head, he stepped forward with the careless gallantry that had won him many a kindly glance from pretty eyes and was strangely to fail him now. For at the look in Madge's calm eyes, he drew back, stammering.

"I — I beg your pardon!" said Doctor Ralph.

Later as he stood thoughtfully by his bedroom window, staring queerly at the wind-beaten elms, he found himself repeating Madge Hildreth's words. "Ruddy-cheeked and rugged and cheerful!"— indeed — this unforgettable Christmas eve. Yes — she was right. Had he not often heard his father say that the Christmas season epitomized all the rugged sympathy and heartiness and health of the country year! To-night the blazing Yule-log, his mother's face — how white her hair was growing, thought Doctor Ralph with a sudden tightening of his throat — all of these memories had strummed forgotten and finer chords. And darkly foiling the homely brightness came the picture of rushing, overstrung, bundle-laden city crowds, of shop-girls white and weary, of store-heaps of cedar and holly sapped by electric glare. Rush and strain and worry — yes — and a spirit of grudging! How unlike the Christmas peace of this white, wind-world outside his window! So Doctor Ralph went to bed with a sigh and a shrug — to listen while the sleety boughs tapping at his windows roused ghostly phantoms of his boyhood. Falling asleep, he dreamt that pretty Madge Hildreth had lightly waved a Christmas wand of crimson above his head and dispelled his weariness and discontent.

IV

Embers

AND in the morning — there was the royal glitter of a Christmas ice-storm to bring boyhood memories crowding again, boughs sheathed in crystal armor and the old barn roof aglaze with ice. Yes — Ralph thrilled — and there were the Christmas bunches of oats on the fences and trees and the roof of the barn — how well he remembered! For the old Doctor loved this Christmas custom too and never forgot the Christmas birds. And to-day — why of course — there would be double allowances of food for the cattle and horses, for old Toby the cat and Rover the dog. Hadn't Ralph once performed this cherished Christmas task himself!

But now, clamoring madly at his door was a romping swarm of youngsters eager to show Uncle Ralph the Christmas tree which, though he had helped to trim it the night before, he inspected in great surprise. And here in his chair by another Yule-log he found Roger, staring wide-eyed at the glittering tree with his thin little arms full of Christmas gifts. Near him was Sister Madge whose black eyes, Ralph

saw with approval, were very soft and gentle, and beyond in the coffee-fragrant dining-room Aunt Ellen and old Annie conspired together over a mammoth breakfast table decked with holly.

"Oh, John, dear," Ralph heard his mother say as the Doctor came in, "I've always said that Christmas is a mother's day. Wasn't the first Christmas a mother's Christmas and the very first tree — a mother's tree?" and then the Doctor's scandalized retort —"Now — now, now, see here, Mother Ellen, it's a father's day, too, don't you forget that!"

And so on to the Christmas twilight through a day of romping youngsters and blazing Yule-logs, of Christmas gifts and Christmas greetings — of a haunting shame for Doctor Ralph at the memory of the wild Christmas he had planned to spend with Griffin and Edwards.

With the coming of the broad shadows which lay among the stiff, ice-fringed spruces like iris velvet, Doctor Ralph's nieces and nephews went flying out to help old Asher feed the stock. By the quiet fire the Doctor beckoned Ralph.

"Suppose, my boy," he said, "suppose you take a look at the little lad's leg here. I've sometimes wondered what you would think of it."

Coloring a little at his father's deferential tone Ralph turned the stocking back from the pitiful shrunken limb and bent over it, his dark face keen

and grave. And now with the surgeon uppermost, Roger fancied Doctor Ralph's handsome eyes were nothing like so tired. Save for the crackle of the fire and the tick of the great clock, there was silence in the firelit room and presently Roger caught something in Doctor Ralph's thoughtful face that made his heart leap wildly.

"An operation," said the young Doctor suddenly — and halted, meeting his father's eyes significantly.

"You are sure!" insisted the old Doctor slowly. "In my day, it was impossible — quite impossible."

"Times change," said the younger man. "I have performed such an operation successfully myself. I feel confident, sir —" but Roger had caught his hand now with a sob that echoed wildly through the quiet room.

"Oh, Doctor Ralph," he blurted with blazing, agonized eyes, "you don't — you can't mean, sir, that I'll walk and run like other boys — and — and climb the Cedar King —" his voice broke in a passionate fit of weeping.

"Yes," said Doctor Ralph, huskily, "I mean just that. Dad and I, little man, we're going to do what we can."

By the window Sister Madge buried her face in her hands.

"Come, come, now Sister Madge," came the Doctor's kindly voice a little later, "you've cried enough,

lass. Roger is fretting about you and Doctor Ralph here, he says he's going to take you for a little sleigh-ride if you'll honor him by going."

Outside a Christmas moon rode high above a sparkling ice-bright world and as the sleigh shot away into its quiet glory, Ralph, meeting the dark, tear-bright eyes of Sister Madge, tucked the robes closer about her with a hand that shook a little.

"'Gipsy' Hildreth!" he said suddenly, smiling, but the hated nickname to-night was almost a caress. "Tell me," Ralph's voice was very grave —"You've been sewing? Mother spoke of it."

"There was nothing else," said Sister Madge. "I could not leave Roger."

"And now Mother wants you to stay on with her. You — you'll do that?"

"She is very lonely," said Madge uncertainly and Ralph bit his lip.

"Mother lonely!" he said. "She didn't tell me that."

"Roger is wild to stay," went on Madge, looking away —"but I — oh — I fear it is only their wonderful kindness. Still there's the Doctor's rheumatism — and he does need some one to keep his books."

"Rheumatism!" said Ralph sharply.

"Yes," nodded Madge in surprise —"didn't you know It's been pretty bad this winter. He's been thinking some of breaking in young Doctor Price to

take part of his practise now and perhaps all of it later."

"Price!" broke out Ralph indignantly. "Oh — that's absurd! Price couldn't possibly swing Dad's work. He's not clever enough."

"He's the only one there is," said Madge and Ralph fell silent.

All about them lay a glittering moonlit country of peaceful, firelit homes and snowy hills — of long quiet roads and shadowy trees and presently Ralph spoke again.

"You like all this," he said abruptly, "the quiet — the country — and all of it?"

Sister Madge's black eyes glowed.

"After all," she said, "is it not the only way to live? This scent of the pine, the long white road, the wild-fire of the winter sunset and the wind and the hills — are they not God-made messages of mystery to man? Life among man-made things — like your cities — seems somehow to exaggerate the importance of man the maker. Life among the God-made hills dwarfs that artificial sense of egotism. It teaches you to marvel at the mystery of Creation. Yesterday when the Doctor and I were gathering the Christmas boughs, the holly glade in the forest seemed like some ancient mystic Christmas temple of the Druids where one might tell his rosary in crimson holly beads and forget the world!"

Well — perhaps there was something fine and sweet and holy in the country something — a tranquil simplicity — a hearty ruggedness — that city dwellers forfeited in their head-long rush for man-made pleasure. After all, perhaps the most enduring happiness lay in the heart of these quiet hills.

"My chief is very keen on country life," said Ralph suddenly. "He preaches a lot. Development of home-spirit and old-fashioned household gods — that sort of thing! He's a queerish sort of chap — my chief — and a bit too — er — candid at times. He was dad's old classmate, you know." And Ralph fell silent again, frowning.

So Price was to take his father's practise! How it must gall the old Doctor! And mother was lonely, eh? — and Dad's rheumatism getting the best of him — Why Great Guns! mother and dad were growing *old!* And some of those snow-white hairs of theirs had come from worrying over him — John had said so. Ralph's dark face burned in the chill night wind. Well, for all old John's cutting sarcasm, his father still had faith in him and the trust in young Roger's eloquent eyes had fairly hurt him. God! they did not know! And then this queer Christmas heart-glow. How Griffin and Edwards and the rest of his gay friends would mock him for it? *Friends!* After all — had he any friends in the finer sense of that finest of words? Such warm-hearted loyal

friends for instance as these neighbors of his father's who had been dropping in all day with a hearty smile and a Christmas hand-shake. And black-eyed Sister Madge — this brave, little fighting gipsy-poet here — where — But here Ralph frowned again and looked away and even when the cheerful lights of home glimmered through the trees he was still thinking — after an impetuous burst of confidence to Sister Madge.

So, later, when Doctor Ralph entered his father's study — his chin was very determined.

"I was ashamed to tell you this morning, sir," he said steadily, "but I — I'm no longer on the staff of St. Michael's. My hand was shaking and — and the chief knew why. And, dad," he faced the old Doctor squarely, "I'm coming back home to keep your practise out of Price's fool hands. You've always wanted that and my chief has preached it too, though I couldn't see it somehow until to-day. And presently, sir, when — when my hand is steadier, I'm going to make the little chap walk and run. I've — promised Sister Madge." And the old Doctor cleared his throat and gulped — and finally he wiped his glasses and walked away to the window. For of all things God could give him — this surely was the best!

"Oh, grandpop," cried little John Leslie 3rd, bolting into the study in great excitement —

"Come see Roger! We kids have made him the Christmas king and he's got a crown o' holly on and — and a wand and he's a-tappin' us this way with it to make us Knights. And I'm the Fir-tree Knight — and Bob — he's a Cedar Knight and Ned's a spruce and Roger — he says his pretty sister tells him stories like that smarter'n any in the books. Oh — do hurry!"

The old Doctor held out his hand to his son.

"Well, Doctor Ralph," he said huskily, "suppose we go tell mother."

So while the Doctor told Aunt Ellen, Ralph bent his knee to this excited Christmas King enthroned in the heart of the fire-shadows.

"Rise —" said Roger radiantly, tapping him with a cedar wand, "I — I dub thee first of all my knights — the good, kind Christmas Knight!"

"And here," said Ralph, smiling, "here's Sister Madge. What grand title now shall we give to her?" But as Sister Madge knelt before him with firelit shadows dancing in her sweet, dark eyes, Roger dropped the wand and buried his face on her shoulder with a little sob.

"Nothing good enough for Sister Madge, eh?" broke in the old Doctor, looking up. "Well, sir, I think you're right."

Now in the silence Aunt Ellen spoke and her words were like a gentle Christmas benediction.

"'Unto us,'" said Aunt Ellen Leslie as she turned the Christmas log, "'this night a son is given!'"

But Ralph, by the window, had not heard. For wakening again in his heart as he stared at the peaceful, moonlit, "God-made" hills — was the old forgotten boyish love for this rugged, simple life of his father's dwarfing the lure of the city and the mockery of his fashionable friends. And down the lane of years ahead, bright with homely happiness and service to the needs of others — was the dark and winsome face of Sister Madge, stirring him to ardent resolution.

Part Two

In Which We Light the New Log with the Embers of the Old

I

The Fire Again

"DOCTOR!" said little Roger slyly, "you got your chin stuck out!"

The Doctor stroked his grizzled beard in hasty apology.

"God bless my soul," he admitted guiltily. "I do believe I have. You've been so quiet," he added accusingly, "curled up there by the fire that I must certainly have gotten lonesome. And I most always stick out my chin that way when I'm lonesome."

Roger, by way of reparation, betook himself to the arm of the Doctor's chair.

The Doctor's arm closed tight around him. A year ago this little adopted son of his had been very lame. It was the first Christmas in his life, indeed, that he had walked.

"Out there," said the Doctor, "the winter twilight's been fighting the alder berries with purple spears. It's conquered everything in the garden and covered it up with misty velvet save the snow and the berries. But the twilight's using heavier spears now

and likely it'll win. *I* want the alder berries to win out, drat it! Their blaze is so bright and cheerful."

Roger accepted the challenge to argument with enthusiasm.

"*I* want the twilight to win," he said.

The Doctor looked slightly scandalized.

"Oh, my, my, my, my!" he said. "I can't for the life of me understand any such gloomy preference as that. Bless me, if I can."

"Why," crowed Roger jubilantly, "*I* can, 'cause the more twilighty it gets, the more it's Christmas eve!"

The Doctor regarded his small friend with admiration.

"By George," he admitted, "I do believe you have me there—" but the Doctor's kindly eyes did not fire to the name of Christmas as Roger thought they ought.

"Almost," he said, "I thought you were going to stick out your chin again. And you're not lonesome now 'cause I'm here an' pretty noisy."

"Hum!" said the Doctor.

"Man to man, now!" urged Roger suddenly.

This was the accepted key to a confessional ceremony which required much politeness and ruthless honesty.

"Well, Mr. Hildreth," began the Doctor formally.

Roger's face fell.

"I'm your adopted son," he hinted, "and you said that made my name same as yours."

"Mr. Leslie!" corrected the Doctor, and Roger glowed.

"Well, Mr. Leslie," went on the Doctor thoughtfully, "I'm chuck full of grievances. There's the rheumatism in my leg, for instance. That's no sort of thing to have at Christmas."

"But that's better," said Roger. "You said so this morning. I 'spect you been thinkin' too much about it like you said I did when my leg was stiff."

"Ahem! And I did hope somebody would come home for Christmas. I like a house full of romping youngsters —"

Roger pointed an accusing finger.

"Aunt Ellen says every blessed one of your children, an' your grand-children too, begged and begged you to come to the city for Christmas an'— an' you wouldn't go 'cause you're old-fashioned and like a country Christmas so much better — an'— an' because you'd promised to teach me to skate on the Deacon's pond an' take me sleighin'."

"Dear me," said the Doctor helplessly, "for such a mite of a kiddy, you do seem remarkably well informed."

"Man to man," reminded Roger inexorably and the Doctor aired his final grievance.

"And then there's that youngest son of mine —"

"Doctor Ralph?"

"Doctor Ralph! What right had he, I'd like to know, to marry that pretty sister of yours and go off honeymooning holiday time. Didn't he know that we needed him and Sister Madge here for Christmas? I miss 'em both. Young pirate!"

Roger's heart swelled with loyalty. It was Doctor Ralph's skilful hand that had helped him walk.

"Most likely," he said fairly, "I'm a little to blame there. After I came home from the hospital, I did tell Sister Madge to marry him —"

"Most likely," acknowledged the Doctor, "I said something similar to Doctor Ralph. I can't have you shouldering all the responsibility. Well, your Honor, there's the Christmas evidence. What's the verdict?"

Roger considered. This man to man game had certain phraseological conclusions.

"No case!" he said suddenly, nor would he alter his decision when the Doctor protested against its severity

"You had so awful many peoply sort of places to go," pointed out Roger, and the Doctor laughed.

"And let you spend this first Christmas on your two legs in a *city?*" he demanded. "Well, I guess not! No-sir-ee-bob! There! — the alder berries have faded out and the garden's thick with twilight."

"And it's Christmas eve!" cried Roger, his black eyes shining with delight.

"Speaking of Christmas," said the Doctor, sniffing luxuriously, "I feel that I ought to slip out to the kitchen for a minute or so. I do smell something tremendously Christmasy and spicy —"

Roger caught his breath. With a Christmas intrigue as surely in the air as the smell of spice, here was dangerous ground.

"Aunt Ellen," he faltered, "Aunt Ellen said she couldn't pos'bly be bothered with — with any men folks in the kitchen — not even me."

"Pooh!" rebelled the Doctor largely, "that's merely a ruse of hers to protect the cookies. And what I'd like to know is just this — what's Aunt Ellen doing in the kitchen anyway? Certainly old Annie's able to do the Christmas fussing for three people. Aunt Ellen ought to be in here with us. That was part of my lonesome grievance but I forgot to mention it."

Roger, shivering apprehensively, visioned suspicious stores of Christmas delicacies — holly and evergreen — and a supper table set for *ten!* And off somewhere among those purple spears of twilight old Asher, the hired man, was waiting at the station with the big farm sleigh.

He must keep his eye upon the Doctor until six o'clock, and lure him away from the window.

"Tell me a story," begged Roger —"over here by the fire." And his voice was so very tremulous and urgent that the hungry Doctor abandoned his notion of a Christmas cooky, and complied.

To Roger, in a nervous ecstasy of anticipation, the story was a blurred hodge-podge of phrases and crackling fire, distant noises of clinking china and hurrying feet, and wild flights of imagination . . . Old Asher must be coming past the red barn now . . . and now down the hill . . . and now past the Deacon's pond . . . and now —

Sleigh-bells fairly leaped out of the quiet, and Roger jumped and gulped, aquiver with excitement. The Doctor regarded him with mild disfavor.

"Bless my soul," he said in surprise, "that was the quietest part of my story. You're restless."

"Go on!" said Roger hoarsely, and the obliging Doctor, mistaking his agitation for interest, went on with his tale.

But Roger had heard old Asher driving along by the picket fence and turning in at the gate-posts, and the story was no more to him than the noisy crackle of the log. Off somewhere in the region of the kitchen door he detected a subdued scuffle of many feet.

The grandfather's clock struck six . . . Roger's cheeks were blazing — the fire and the Doctor still duetting . . . Why, oh, why didn't somebody come

and call them to supper? . . . There had been plenty of time now for everything. Why —

The door swung back and Roger jumped. Old Annie, Asher's wife, stood in the doorway, her wrinkled face inscrutable.

"Supper, sir!" she said and vanished. Hand in hand, the Doctor and Roger went out to supper.

The dining-room door was closed. That in itself was unusual. But the unsuspecting Doctor pushed through with Roger at his heels, only to halt and stare dumfounded over his spectacles while Roger screamed and danced and clapped his hands. For to the startled eyes of Doctor John Leslie, the snug, old-fashioned room was alive with boys and holly — boys and boys and boys upon boys, he would have told you in that first instant of delighted consternation, in different stages of embarrassment and rags. And one had but to glance at the faces of old Asher and Annie in the kitchen doorway, at Aunt Ellen, hovering near her Christmas brood with the look of all mothers in her kind, brown eyes, and then at Roger, scarlet with enthusiasm, to know that the Doctor had been the victim of benevolent conspiracy.

"It's a s'prise!" shrieked Roger, "a Christmasy s'prise! Aunt Ellen she says you're so awful keen on s'prisin' other folks that we'd show you — an' — an' you'll have a bang-up Christmas with kids like you love an' so will I, an' so will they an' the minis-

ter he went to the city and found seven boys crazy for Christmas in the country an'—"

"Roger! Roger!" came Aunt Ellen's gentle voice — "do please take a breath, child. You're turning purple."

The Doctor adjusted his glasses.

"Seven boys!" he said. "Bless my soul, when I opened that door I saw seventy boys!" He counted them aloud — then for no reason at all save that he had glanced into seven eager faces, thinner and sharper than he liked, for all they glowed with excitement and furtive interest in the long supper table asparkle with lights and holly, he wiped his glasses and patted Roger on the back.

"Is your leg botherin' so much now, daddy Doctor?" demanded Roger.

"Nothing like so much," admitted the Doctor.

"Are you lonesome 'nuff now to stick out your chin?"

"Bless your heart, Roger," admitted the Doctor huskily, "I'm so full of Christmas I can hardly breathe!"

"Hooray!" said Roger. "Me, too."

II

It Blazes Higher

IT was well that the Doctor had a way with boys, for there was a problem to be solved here with infinite tact — a problem of protuberant eyes and paralyzing self-consciousness, of unnatural silences and then unexpected attempts at speech that died in painful rasps and gurgles, of stubbing toes and nudging elbows, of a centipedal supply of arms and legs that interfered with abortive and conscience-stricken attempts at courtesy, and above all an interest in the weave of the carpet that was at once a mania and an epidemic — but by the time supper was well under way, things, in the language of Roger, had begun to hum, and by the time the Doctor had mastered the identities of his guests, from Jim, the shy, sullen boy who would not meet his eyes, to Mike's little brother, Muggs, who consumed prodigious quantities of everything in staring silence, and looked something like a girl save for a tardily-cast-off suit of Mike's, somewhat oceanic in flow and fit, the hum had become celebrative and distinctly a thing of Christmas.

When the Yule Log Burns

Constraint in the mellowing halo of a Christmas eve supper where holly and a Yule-log blazed and the winter wind frostily rattled the checker-paned windows of the sitting-room in jealous spleen, fled to join the Doctor's rheumatism.

By the time the grandfather's clock struck seven through a haze of holly, the Doctor had pokered the Yule-log into a frenzied shower of gold; apples and nuts were steadily disappearing from a basket by the Doctor's chair and the Doctor himself was relating an original Christmas tale of adventure, born of uncommon inspiration and excitement, to a huddled group with circular eyes and contented stomachs. But Muggs — inimitable workman — his small face partially obscured by the biggest apple in the basket, had not yet spoken, and Jim, the shy, sullen little boy to whom Roger had taken a fancy because he was lame, had met the Doctor's eyes but once, and then with a rush of color.

Now, whether it was the scheming excitement of a busy day or the warmth of a busy log or the rambling yarn of a busy Doctor, who may say? Certainly Roger fell asleep at a fictional crisis and remained asleep for all that Jim furtively nudged him.

"There!" said the Doctor as the clock struck eight, "that's all. To bath and beds, every one of you! Annie's had a lamp on the kitchen table this half hour ready to light you up the stairs. My!

My! My! — but there's a busy day ahead. Roger! Well, of all ungrateful listeners! Roger!"

But in the end, the Doctor carried Roger up to bed, preceded by Annie with the lamp. And while Annie was turning back quilts and smoothing pillows and fumbling at windows, with the freedom of long service she soundly berated the Doctor for postponing the bed-time hour with his Christmas twaddle.

"And Mister Muggs there," she said severely, "has had one apple too many, I'm thinkin,' and the last one as big as his head He'll need a pill before morning. The child's packed himself that hard and round ye fear to touch him." And then because Muggs was such a very little boy Annie was minded to assist with his bath, and laid kindly hands upon an indefinite outer garment which began immediately beneath his arm-pits and ended at his shoe-tops in singular fringe.

"An,' ma'am," she explained to Aunt Ellen a little later, "I had to let him go in to his bath by himself. No more had I touched his bushel-basket of rags — an' they were hitched over his shoulders with school straps and somebody's shirtwaist underneath — than he let out a terrific shriek (ye must have heard him) an' all the boys come runnin' and crowdin' round him and starin' so frightened at me, an' his brother yelled at him to keep quiet or something or some-

body'd get him, and he kept quiet that sudden I could fairly see the child swell. He's unnatural still and unnatural full, ma'am, an' the Doctor better leave his pills handy."

Bathed and freshly night-gowned, the Doctor's guests tumbled, a little noisily into bed. Only Jim lay silent and wakeful. Once he nudged his bed-fellow.

"Luke," he whispered, "d'ye think I'd orta tell 'em?"

"Aw," said Luke sleepily, "dry up, Jim! Gosh, ain't the bed soft!"

Jim sighed.

Christmas came to the old farmhouse with the distant echo of village bells at midnight but, long before that, Christmas, in a fur cap and greatcoat had swept up the driveway with a jingle of sleigh-bells, behind old Polly, the Doctor's mare, his sleigh packed high with bundles. By the light of a late moon, flinging festal silver on the snow, it might be seen that Christmas resembled a somewhat guilty looking old gentleman with a grizzled beard.

"I'll catch old Scratch!" he admitted, suddenly overcome by the bulbous appearance of the sleigh, "but Ellen may say what she will. She *couldn't* have thought of everything!"

No call for pills came that night from Muggs, asleep in a crib that had seen much service. He was

awake however long before daylight, trembling with excitement.

"Mike, oh Mike!" he called hoarsely. "Wake up. It's Christmas mornin'."

Mike, in a big bed with Marty Fay, sat up.

"Don't you *dare* open your mouth to-day!" he cried in blood-thirsty accents, "or Mom Murphy'll git ye surer'n scat. Ain't I schemed enuff to git ye here? Huh? Wanta be sent home — huh?" Muggs ducked beneath the blankets with a shivering wail.

III

The Log at Dawn

IN the still, cold corridors of a farmhouse, with frost-jungles clouding every window pane and a zero-dark outside, the cry of "Merry Christmas!" is most at home. Let noses be ever so cold and blanketed bodies ever so warm, the cry fills the dawn with electric energy. The Doctor began it. He knew by the instant response that he had started something that he could not stop. Almost in no time, it seemed, Roger was leading a wild, bare-footed scamper down the stairs — for Roger *knew* — and the Doctor, hastily bath-robed and slippered, was on behind with a lamp. But here was no cyclonic invasion of a dark, cold sitting-room. Old Annie and Asher knew boys! A log blazed brightly in the fireplace and the lamp was lit. If the room was over-warm, it proved simply that Annie had seen boys of another generation rushing down of a Christmas morning, scantily clad.

And the King of Christmas trees blazed in candle-glory from wall to wall, tinselled boughs sagging with

the weight of its Christmas freight. It could not have been bigger — it could not have glittered more. It had as many arms as an Octopus and its shaggy evergreen head, starred gorgeously with iridescence, brushed the old-fashioned paper on the ceiling. A great, lovable Christmas giant guarding a cargo of Christmas gifts!

Muggs emitted one blood-curdling shriek of delight, clapped his hand over his mouth and began to swell about the cheeks. Then he stepped on the hem of his night-gown and fell sprawling at Annie's feet.

"Dear me," said Annie vexedly, though she righted him with kindly hands, "I can't for the life of me make out what ails that child. He acts so mortal queer at times, an' he's ready to swell up over nothing at all."

With the advent of Aunt Ellen, Christmas packages began to lose twine and paper, and what the packages lost the sitting-room speedily gained in disorder. For here were warm suits and overcoats, shoes and stockings and sweaters and caps, skates and horns and whistles and drums, home-made popcorn and candy, oranges — ah! well, sensible gifts in plenty, and foolish gifts that were wiser than Solomon for they included a boy's heart as well as his body.

In a lull all eyes turned to Muggs. His pockets

were crammed with pop-corn and candy. One arm was quite as full of toys as he could pack it — the other had begun the day's conveyance of food from hand to mouth, but he was regarding a very small, warm suit of clothes and substantial boots with dangerously quivering lips. Nor could one misinterpret his disapproval. For a moment the startled Doctor fancied he heard Mike hiss the astonishing words "Mom Murphy!" but by the time he had wheeled about, Muggs, with circular eyes of terror, had begun to swell.

"That child," said Annie, "has something on his mind. Don't tell me! I know it."

The inevitable blare of racket came all too soon. Horns and whistles and drums united in a deafening blast, and if thanks did not come easily to the lips of boys, noise did. Nor could Muggs at any time thereafter be separated from a shoulder drum upon which he had beaten with insane and single-minded concentration even after the din was past and a hungry hint of breakfast in the air. Lacking one outlet of expression he had seized upon another. He drummed his way fiercely upstairs, to dress, and he drummed his way down to breakfast, a ridiculous self-consciousness in his small face whenever he glanced at his new suit of clothes. Small as it was it engulfed him utterly.

"Jim!" said the Doctor suddenly. "You're not limping!"

Jim hung his head and glanced at his shining new shoes.

"No, sir!" he said and gulped.

"Bless me," said the Doctor, adjusting his spectacles, "I thought you were lame and if I hadn't forgotten it last night you'd have had no skates this morning."

"I didn't have no heel on one shoe," blurted Jim in confusion, and Roger, in relief, hoorayed himself into hoarseness.

But Jim, like Muggs, was something of a mystery, and after a time the Doctor, with a sigh, abandoned his effort to break through the boy's sullen shyness. Still Jim was the first at the chopping block when Annie wanted wood, and when the task took on something of the charm of Tom Sawyer's fence by reason of a winter wren, so tame from overfeeding that he perched himself now and then upon the handle of the ax, Jim fell back with resentment and resigned the ax to Marty Fay who spat upon his hands, doubled up his fists, sparred, in an excess of good spirits, with an invisible antagonist, and thereafter made the chips fly so fast that the little wren departed.

Already there were great Christmas bunches of oats upon glistening trees and fences, but, while

Asher was carrying double portions of food to cattle and horses, to Toby, the cat, and Rover, the dog, the Doctor went about, with an eager pack of boys at his heels, distributing further Christmas largess for his feathered friends — suet and crumbs and seed. For there were chickadees in the clump of red cedars by the barn, and juncos and nuthatches, white-throated sparrows and winter wrens, all so frank in their overtures to the Doctor that the boys with one accord closed threateningly around Muggs to keep him from drumming the birds into flight. Jim fastened a great chunk of suet to a tree-trunk and very soon a red-breasted nuthatch was busy with his Christmas breakfast. Altogether Roger's bang-up Christmas began with terrific bustle, with Annie, from whose kitchen already floated odors that set the insatiable Muggs to sniffing, by far the busiest of them all.

The grandfather's clock struck ten. It found the old farmhouse deserted save for Annie in the kitchen and Aunt Ellen in her rocking chair by the sitting-room window. The Doctor was guiding his guests to the Deacon's pond.

New skates, new sweaters, and a pond as smooth as glass! What wonder then that Roger's trembling fingers bungled his straps, and Jim, kneeling, fastened them on with nimble fingers.

"Ain't ye never skated?"

"No — I — I been lame. Oh, hurry, Jim! See, Mike's flyin' down the pond like wind!"

Jim's eyes softened.

"I'll teach ye," he said.

As for the Doctor he had disinterred an ancient pair of skates from the attic, and presently he began to perform pedal convolutions of such startling design and eccentricity that the boys gathered about him and cheered until, seating himself unexpectedly in the center of a particularly wide and airy flourish, he flatly told the boys to run about their business.

Now Muggs, though he carried upon his shoulder a ridiculous pair of elfin skates, was much too small a boy, his brother thought, to embark upon the ice, wherefore he stood like a sentinel upon the shore and drummed and ate incessantly, until an orange catapulted from an overcrowded pocket, when he pursued it with a roar.

The peal of the village town-clock striking twelve came all too soon, but homing was no task with a turkey at the end. Muggs, still wrapped in mysterious silence, knew the very spot where Christmas odors began to permeate the frosty air and redoubled the speed in his drumming arm, but when after a vigorous scrubbing his glistening eye fell upon the holly-bright table and an enormous turkey by the Doctor's plate, only a frosty menace in Mike's eye, it seemed, restrained another blood-curdling

shriek of delight. There was paralyzing apology in his eyes as Mike's lips formed the soundless threat —"Mom Murphy!"

"He's holdin' himself in," said Annie, "Mister Muggs, give me the drum! Ye'll not crowd into the chair with that upon your shoulder!"

It seemed that Mister Muggs would. He began to swell. He began to drum. He carried his point and crammed himself and his drum into his chair at the table. He did not speak. Neither, from that time on, did he permit any lapse in his industry. What Muggs did, from drum to drum-sticks, he did well.

Muggs ate turkey and mashed turnips. Muggs ate potatoes, cranberry sauce, boiled onions, and quite a little celery. He glinted ahead at a pie on the sideboard, seemed to make hurried structural calculations, and pushed his plate again toward the turkey. Aunt Ellen looked at the Doctor and the Doctor looked at Muggs.

"If the child eats any more," said Annie bluntly from the kitchen door, "he must have a pill. 'Tis enough for him to drum away the peace of the Christmas day without stuffin' himself that hard and round ye fear for his buttons. An' to my mind, if he'd talk more and eat less, he'd not be in such danger o' burstin'."

Mike looked slightly agitated.

"Muggs," said the Doctor firmly, "it comes to this. More turkey — one pill. No turkey — no pill."

Muggs exhibited a capacity for instant decision. With stubby forefinger rigid, he shoved his plate a little closer to the turkey.

IV

The Log at Twilight

THERE was a straw-ride in the farm sleigh after dinner, a story or two by the Yule log when the twilight closed in and Annie had lit the Christmas candles on the tree, and then as the boys were romping in a game of Roger's the Doctor slipped away to his study for a quiet hour with a book. His lamp was barely lighted and the book upon his knee when the door opened and Jim stood before him, his face so white and strained that the Doctor laid aside his book, thinking instantly, of course, that here again was too much turkey.

Jim hung his head, one toe burrowing in the carpet.

"Doctor John!" he burst forth hoarsely.

"Yes?"

Jim gulped.

"I — I been in *jail!*"

The Doctor looked once at Jim's face, quivering in an agony of shame, and hastily wiped his glasses. In the quiet came the laughter of romping boys.

"Why," said the Doctor very gently, "did you tell me?"

Something in the kindly voice opened the floodgates of a boy's sore heart. Jim's mouth quivered piteously, then he broke down and hid his face behind his elbow, sobbing wildly.

"I wanta be square," he cried passionately, "I wanta be square like you've been to us, an'— an Luke said ye might not want a jail-bird here for Christmas. I — stole — coal — for mom —"

It was the old tale, one boy caught, paying for the petty thievery of the score who ran away. The Doctor heard the mumbled tale to the end and cleared his throat.

"And so," he said slowly, "you wanted to be square. That's the finest thing I've heard this Christmas day. Wanted to be square. Well, well!" His hand was on Jim's shoulder now. "Jim, I wonder if you could come back to me next Christmas and tell me you'd been absolutely straight —"

"*Here!*" said Jim in a choking whisper, his eyes blazing through his tears, "again — for *Christmas!*"

Somewhere on a snowy page a Christmas angel wrote: "One boy saved by the spirit of a country Christmas!"

"Here," repeated the Doctor, "again — for

Christmas." He opened the door. "Run along, now, Jim," he said kindly, "or the boys will miss you."

Jim's final words were very queer.

"Doctor John," he blurted, "I — I'm a goin' to send poor little Muggs."

The Doctor was devoutly hoping that Muggs had never been in jail for stealing food or drums, when Muggs himself appeared clinging desperately to the hand of Mike. He seemed on the verge of a lachrymose explosion.

Mike's face was very red but it was also very hopeful.

"Jim said to tell ye," he mumbled. "She ain't never had no Christmas an' the minister he said the order was all boys an'— an' she cried, so Mom said bring her anyway in my ol' suit — you'd never know, an'— an'— an'— Oh, my gosh!" finished Mike tragically, "Muggs is a girl. Her — her name's C-c-c-c-clara!"

The Doctor jumped. So did Muggs. The lachrymose explosion came and the drum slipped down from the shoulder of Muggs with a clatter.

"Don't wanta go home!" came the heartbroken wail, "don't wanta go home. Mom Murphy'll git me."

"I — I tol' her," explained Mike uncomfortably, "that she mustn't open her mouth once — jus' act

deaf an' dumb or you'd guess maybe an' send her home an' Mom Murphy'd git her. An'— an'— she must take a drum like a boy —"

Literal Muggs! Heaven alone knew by what other bloodthirsty threats than Mom Murphy Mike had encompassed the stony silence and frenzied drumming of the little sister who had never had a Christmas.

"But why," burst forth the despairing Doctor. "In heaven's name — why — Muggs?"

"She makes such awful faces," said Mike apologetically. "Mom don't know what makes her that way." And then as Muggs was at the climax of one of the spasms that had won her her name, the Doctor suddenly lifted her in gentle arms and tossed her to the ceiling.

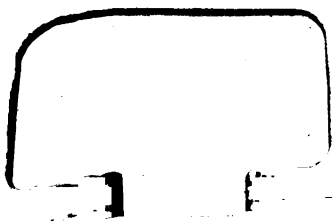
"Poor, poor little kiddy!" he said huskily. "What a price she's paid for her Christmas."

But Muggs had forgotten the price. Though it had been a hard day the Doctor's eyes were kind and twinkly. Muggs buried her flushed and tearful little face on his shoulder with a sigh of content. He saw now that one knot of ribbon on the tousled, sunny curls would have told the story, then he glanced at the bagging suit and opened the door. Muggs went forth upon the Doctor's shoulder.

"Asher," cried the Doctor, "hitch old Polly to the sleigh and telephone Sam Remsen that he can oblige me for once and open his store."

"Ye — ye ain't goin' to send her home, are ye?" faltered Mike.

"I'm going," cried the Doctor, "to buy Clara-Muggs a dress and a doll. It's her night."

The boys cheered.

G. F. WARFIELD & CO.
BOOKSELLERS & STATIONERS
HARTFORD. CONN.